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# Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

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*Marble Head of a Goddess*

*Greek: Fourth Century B. C.*

Purchased from the Bartlett Fund and with contributions by  
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### A Greek Head of a Goddess

THE head here illustrated was acquired by the Museum last summer, and is now exhibited in the second Marble Room in the Classical Wing. Nothing is known as to its origin except for the report, believed to be reliable, that it was found in Greece. Its colossal size and the type of the face show that it is from the statue of a goddess, probably a cult image erected in a Greek temple. Some of the later history of the head can be gleaned from its condition. The fall of the statue from its pedestal broke off the nose, lips, and chin, and caused some minor injuries. Then the head apparently came to rest with its right side upward. The moisture in the soil which gradually collected above it covered that side with a brown, earthy stain, and the roots of plants left their marks upon the surface. Finally, before being brought to light again, it had to suffer some twenty blows from the careless finder's pick. These injuries appear all too clearly in the photographs, and seriously affect the first impression which the work makes upon the beholder. There are, however, some items also to be set down on the credit side of the account. One of the chief beauties of the work is the majestic and yet graceful poise of the head, and this could not have been appreciated if the neck had not been preserved intact. And in spite of all the disfigurements the surface of the marble is still in many places nearly as fresh as when it left the sculptor's hands. On the left side, which was less exposed to the moisture of the soil, it has its original patina, of a warm, creamy tone.

The marble is Parian of fine quality. This material, being hard to obtain in large blocks, was often used by Greek sculptors as here, only for the heads of their draped statues, while the bodies were executed in an inferior variety of marble. In the present case the base of the neck is roughly worked in two oblique planes which rested in a cavity in the top of the torso. The edges of the dress would serve to conceal the joint. The missing top of the head was also worked separately and attached by a dowel, again probably owing to the insufficiency of the material; and the fact that the head has less than its proper depth from front to back is doubtless due to the same cause.

The height of the fragment is 0.47 m., the length of the face 0.25 m., showing that the statue was about one-third larger than life. Its pose cannot be determined from the remains, though the erect carriage of the head suggests that the figure was standing rather than seated. The left shoulder was raised, and the head is inclined to its left and turned slightly in the same direction, so that the face must have appeared almost in three-quarter view as one stood before the statue. The drapery which covers the back of the head seems not to be a part of the mantle, as usually, but a small kerchief, or veil. One edge of it is apparently tied about the crown, and the fullness at the

sides falls in simple folds. Its surface is left rough for the application of color.

An examination of details reveals a close relationship in style between this work and the two finest fourth-century heads in the collection — the Bartlett head of Aphrodite and the Thayer head of a goddess from Chios. The hair is parted above the middle of the forehead and drawn to the sides in thick masses covering the tips of the ears. Though its surface is badly injured, enough remains to show that it was left rough, the details being indicated by lightly chiseled, wavy lines, with deeper depressions at intervals, dividing the mass on each side into five or six strands. This same sketchy, impressionistic rendering of the hair is better illustrated by the Bartlett head, of which it has been justly claimed that there is "no better example extant of the Praxitelean manner of treating the long, dressed hair of a woman." On both heads, as on the Hermes at Olympia, the rough texture of the hair is in marked contrast to the surface of the flesh, which is carefully finished with a slight polish.

The type of the face differs from those of the other two heads, yet here again striking resemblances are to be observed in the carving of details. The forehead is broad, low, and of the triangular shape usual in the fourth century. Its distinguishing feature, however, is its great prominence in the centre. If a horizontal section were taken through the head just above the level of the brows, the outline would be seen to form a very pronounced curve, flattened out slightly over the eyes, and becoming more pronounced at the centre. This is a daring departure from nature, which might almost



*Head of a Goddess*

*Side View*

be described as a deformity, if it did not add so much to the force and ideal beauty of the countenance. The forehead of the Chios head has almost identically the same curve. In both heads, as a result of the rapid receding of the forehead to the sides, the inner angles of the eyes are deeply set, but the greater portions of them are not sunk deeply, nor strongly overshadowed by the brows. The opening of the eye is long and narrow; the upper lid droops, and the lower lid is very slightly accentuated. Towards the outer corner it is raised hardly at all from the eye-ball, and both lids meet the eye-ball in delicate curves, not with the sharp edges found in Greek works down to the middle of the fourth century, and in all Graeco-Roman copies. There are slight differences: in the colossal head the eyes are larger proportionally, and the upper lids droop farther, so that the gaze is directed downward. But the gentle expression is the same, and is attained by the same means. In the Chios head this "evanescent treatment" of the eyes is carried further than in any other known example. It appears also in the Hermes at Olympia, and has been convincingly explained by Mr. Marshall as that quality of the works of Praxiteles which ancient critics described by the term *ὕψις* — "an expression soft, radiant and pleasant." \*

In the lower half of the face the resemblance to the Chios head is less marked, though the parts about the mouth show the same subtle modelling, and the slightly parted lips were soft and full. The outline of the face is a long oval, somewhat heavier at the base than in the other head; and the cheeks are fleshier. The neck is large; the folds about the throat are delicately carved, but not emphasized as on some works of Praxitelean type.

In their discussions of the head from Chios M. Rodin and Mr. Marshall have praised especially its *force*, explaining it as due to the simple geometrical, rather than anatomical scheme, which "underlies the modelling as the bones underly the flesh," and which "can permit much subtlety of modelling without any danger of resulting weakness." These remarks apply equally well to the colossal head. If any one detail contributes more than the rest to this quality of force, it is the shape of the forehead, which is the same in both heads. For the carving of the eyes and the mouth, and the delicate modulation of the surface both the Chios head and the Aphrodite offer close parallels; and we have already noted the resemblance to the latter in the rendering of the hair. The three heads thus form a homogeneous group; and, aside from the Hermes, there are few marbles extant which illustrate so completely the spirit as well as the style and technique of Praxiteles.

In the absence of definite attributes the identification of the goddess represented must remain conjectural. But the choice is limited by the veil

and the character of the face to matronly divinities, such as Hera, Leto, and Demeter. And of these the last named seems the most appropriate. It is not the sorrowing Demeter, mourning the loss of her daughter, as she is represented in the well-known statue in the British Museum, but the kindly dispenser of the fruits of the earth to mortals. This is the conception which we might expect Praxiteles to have embodied in his statues of the great Eleusinian goddess; and the newly-acquired fragment, perhaps from the hand of one of his immediate followers, may give us a reflection of one of the lost works of the master.

L. D. C.



*The Nativity* Taddeo Gaddi (c. 1300-c. 1366)  
Height, 0.35 m.; width, 0.34 m.

### Some Early Italian Paintings in the Museum Collection

THE following notes, which have been put together at the request of the Director of the Museum, are not intended to give full information about the pictures mentioned, but only to contain short statements as to their painters.

Among the early Italian pictures which I have had the good fortune of seeing in the storerooms of the Museum, there are some of decided individual character. Even if they are not in a perfect state of preservation, they have undeniable historical interest and therefore may be worth discussing for the benefit of students.

The first one is a little Nativity which once formed part of the collection of J. J. Jarves. It might have been a predella picture; at least its size is no larger than that of a predella piece. The picture is a rather late work by *Taddeo Gaddi*. It is entirely characteristic of the master and is most closely related in style to his altarpiece in Pistoia, dated 1353. The composition is traditional. The Virgin sits under a shed where the crib is placed, and lifts the coverlet from the Child.

\* Marshall, *Jahrbuch* XXIV, 1909, pages 87-91, and the note at the end of the article, pages 92-98.